United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL POLICY MACHINERY
(PURSUANT TO S. RES. 115, 86TH CONGRESS)

October 1959

BACKGROUND MEMORANDUM ON

STUDY OF NATIONAL POLICY MACHINERY

In July, 1959, the Senate unanimously adopted S. Res. 115, which authorized the Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery of the Senate Government Operations Committee to study the effectiveness of existing government organizations and procedures for formulating and executing national security policy in the contest with world communism.

The inquiry now underway represents the first comprehensive review of national security policy-making machinery undertaken since the passage of the National Security Act of 1947. That Act, which created the Department of Defense and the National Security Council, was adopted before our nation as a whole, and our policy-makers in general, realized that the cold war would be the dominant fact of international life in our time.

The twelve years which have passed since the National Security Act of 1947 have seen world communism obliterate the traditional distinction between peace and war. World communism now challenges us all the time. The competition goes across the board -- it is military, industrial, scientific, political, ideological, cultural, and diplomatic.

It is now commonly accepted that the cold war may persist for 25 or 50 years into the future. The fundamental issue before the Subcommittee is this: How can we best organize for the long pull to generate the sustained national effort which will be needed to win out in the cold war? How can our free society so organize its human and material resources as to outthink, outplan, and outperform totalitarianism? How can our government best organize to formulate, and to translate into effective policies and programs, a coherent national strategy which has as its goal helping build a world community of peace, justice and order?

This study is not concerned with questions of substantive policy as such. It will not pass judgment, that is, on particular policy decisions made in the cold war. Rather, it is concerned with

whether existing governmental machinery gives us the greatest possible likelihood of devising and successfully carrying out integrated and effective national security programs.

The Subcommittee is keenly aware that good policy-making machinery can never substitute for good leadership. It believes equally, however, that good organization can help and that poor organization hurts.

The Subcommittee is also aware of the Constitutional role of the President and the Executive Branch in the field of national security, and will be mindful of these prerogatives and responsibilities throughout its inquiry.

The Subcommittee assumes that there is no facile solution to the problem of building effective national security machinery, and would view with suspicion over-simplified remedies purporting to solve our difficulties through quick and easy modification of existing structures or procedures.

Finally, the Subcommittee assumes that we face a national problem, far transcending either political party or any particular administration. The President has pledged his cooperation with the Subcommittee's work. The views and considered opinions of appropriate officials in the Executive Branch are being actively sought and received. The study is being conducted throughout on a scholarly, objective and non-partisan basis.

The Subcommittee plans to spend much of the remainder of this year soliciting the views of numerous present and former government officials, and students of our national policy-making process. Formal hearings are anticipated early in the next session of the Congress. It is presumed that these hearings will be followed by a comprehensive report, containing findings and recommendations and any proposals for legislative action deemed appropriate.

The Subcommittee consists of Senator Henry M. Jackson, (D., Wash.), Chairman, and Senators Hubert Humphrey, (D., Minn.), and Karl Mundt, (R., S.D.).

The Subcommittee has already held more than 100 interviews with participants in or qualified observers of our policy-making process. It has also solicited in writing the views of twice that number of people. In addition, the Subcommittee has requested the Legislative Reference Service of the Library of Congress and several departments of the government to initiate studies or furnish background information relevant to the Subcommittee's work.

At this time, it is still too early to develop fixed ideas concerning improvements in our policy-making machinery. However, the

Subcommittee staff has provisionally identified the following broad problem areas as meriting further systematic study. The questions which appear to warrant exploration will of course be revised as the inquiry proceeds.

1. What can be done to improve State-Defense coordination?

Some, observing that the main task of formulating national security policies must fall jointly upon the Departments of State and Defense, place great emphasis upon the proper integration of political ends and military means in establishing our national strategic objectives. They state that, too often, our nation's political ends have been shaped to meet military means, rather than vice versa. Or else they maintain that the defense establishment has often been unable to secure adequate guidance concerning our foreign policy objectives when determining force levels and the composition of our weapons mix. Those of this persuasion agree that State-Defense cooperation is now close on many specific policy issues and operational matters, but question whether the same coordination is reflected in broad strategic policies of great importance. If this is true, what corrective steps would be desirable?

2. What should be the role of the office of Secretary of State in relation to the President?

One school of thought suggests that the policy-making role of the office of the Secretary of State be redefined and enlarged. Some assert that his views should carry greater weight and authority in NSC deliberations. Others recommend that he be asked to testify concerning foreign policy implications of the defense budget. Yet others suggest that he be made the true "first officer" of the government, and advance proposals whereby he would be freed from the necessity of attending Foreign Ministers' meetings. Should the Secretary of State's role be enlarged? If so, in what manner?

3. How can the National Security Council best function?

Many suggestions have been made for improving the National Security Council - Operations Coordinating Board process. It is argued by some that NSC policy papers are sometimes so compromised and general as not to be useful guides for planning and action. Others believe that the NSC has grown too big; still others maintain that the NSC staff should be enlarged; yet others hold that the entire NSC-OCB process has become cumbersome and unwieldy. Another view is that the State and Defense Departments should have greater authority to initiate and present policy papers. Which criticisms, if any, are justified, and what form should remedial action take?

4. What should be the role of the President's staff in national security policy-making?

Some maintain that a non-parochial national strategy and supporting policies can be made "only at the summit". They advance various suggestions for enlarging the advisory role of the President's staff. These include proposals to create new Special Assistants to the President, to enlarge the National Security Council staff, and to establish semi-autonomous operations research organizations whose studies would be available to the President's office. What are the merits and shortcomings of such suggestions?

5. Can we improve the system for the allocation of resources devoted to national security?

At any given level of expenditures for national security purposes, it is obviously impossible to satisfy every potentially worthwhile requirement. It is therefore vital that resources be allocated according to some set of priorities. Many contend that we do not now have an agreed-upon national strategy and that, as a result, it is impossible to establish priorities on an intelligent basis. Others hold that existing budgetary processes are not a responsive instrument for relating resource allocations to our national security objectives and policy. What steps would contribute to the more effective allocation of our resources?

6. Can better mechanisms be devised for increasing our ability to satisfy our national security requirements?

The larger our gross national product, the greater is our ability to meet the various private and public demands on the economy. In the past, however, economic growth and national security have not been clearly related in our policy making. As a result, some contend that our national security requirements and programs have not sufficiently reflected our ability to increase our gross national product, and to allocate in the process more resources for the needs of the cold war. Therefore, they continue, our forward planning suffers from unnecessary constraints. Some argue for a national economic budget, projecting the nation's economic growth for several years ahead on various assumptions about the nation's economic policies. What means might be found to relate considerations of economic growth more closely to national security policy?

7. How can we more closely integrate scientific research and development with our foreign policy objectives?

A growing number of observers single out the field of scientific research and development as one [illegible]

cooperation is particularly required. They state that, too frequently, our foreign policy makers lack familiarity with the nature of our research and development programs, and the prospective political implications of weapons systems in the developmental stage. On the other hand, they assert, our research and development community does not ask the Department of State to comment upon the political desirability of its developmental programs, or to suggest new areas of technological exploration which might better further our foreign policy objectives. What can be done to effect closer cooperation?

8. How can the "committee system" be made to work more effectively?

Thousands of inter- and intra-departmental committees on all levels of decision-making are part of our machinery for formulating and executing national security policy. The complaint is often made that the committee system results in excessive compromises, diffuses responsibility, conceals or eliminates important policy alternatives before they are debated at appropriate levels, and excessively slows down the decision-making process. A typical proposed administrative reform would grant committee chairmen the power of decision, subject to appeal and review. Might the adoption of such or similar procedures be practical and beneficial?

9. How can we develop better policy-makers?

Some, while conceding the importance of good policy-making machinery, place equal or greater stress upon programs for increasing the skills, breadth, and insight of policy-makers themselves. They contend that existing career management programs within the Departments of State and Defense, and within the military services, need amendment if we are to produce senior policy-makers with the required breadth of experience and depth of view. One proposal calls for establishing a senior staff service, composed of a limited number of outstanding civilian employees and military officers who have followed career lines specifically designed to give them extensive operational experience outside their normal departments or services. The members of this senior staff might be given opportunities for special education and training both below and above the National War College level. Should this or similar career management programs be adopted?

10. What can be done about the high turnover of top policy-makers at the Senate confirmation level?

It is often contended that top policy-makers, particularly at the Assistant Secretary level, too often leave government service

before they have mastered their jobs. Some seek means whereby candidates for such positions would give more explicit assurances of their willingness to serve for longer periods; other suggest we move closer to the British system of permanent departmental under secretaries. What suggestions have merit?

11. How can the scientist best play his vital part in the policy process?

The ever-growing role of science and the scientist in national security policy-making has created administrative problems of complexity and importance. For many years, we have experimented, both within the departments and the Executive Office, with various ad hoc arrangements designed to bring competent scientific advice to bear on policy at appropriate decision-making levels. Many express dissatisfaction with both past and present solutions to the problem. What improvements can be made?

12. Can better procedures be devised for assuring timely consideration of important facts, ideas and policy alternatives at appropriate government levels?

A common complaint is that informational channels within the government make for excessively long delays between the time when important new facts or policy and program alternatives are first developed outside or at lower echelons within the government, and the time when they are considered by top-level policy-makers. A similar complaint concerns informational barriers between departments. Some say that internal overclassification of information is an important source of the difficulty; others believe the Executive Branch should establish some watchdog group, charged with speeding the flow of important information to appropriate officials. What changes are desirable?

13. What contribution can "think groups" make to our problem?

Many recommend that semi-autonomous policy research organizations be established to assist either the Secretary of State or the President and the national security advisers in his office. These proposals range from creating a small academy, which might be available for dispassionate counsel on a limited number of policy issues of unusual complexity and importance, to establishing a large-scale, Rand-type organization, which might undertake or sponsor comprehensive research programs in a wide variety of fields relevant to national security. If it is desirable to create such groups, how broad should their mandate be, what degree of autonomy should they possess, and where might they best be placed in our organizational structure?

14. Can better machinery or procedures be developed for helping promote wider public understanding of national security problems?

It is hardly necessary to state that only a well informed and understanding public can meet the demands made on it by a long-range cold war. Numerous students and officials seek ways to promote this understanding and obtain more meaningful public discussion of important national security issues. Some see a useful analogy in the annual report of the Council of Economic Advisers, which has served as an important vehicle for stimulating discussion of economic problems. They suggest the desirability of some counterpart report in the national security field, issued under different auspices. What steps can be taken in this area?